



Below is information regarding the joint interim charge between the Corrections, and Defense & Veterans' Affairs committees.

The information is broken down into three sections:

- I. GAPS IN SERVICES/EFFORTS TO CONNECT JIV TO SERVICES
- II. TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE AGENCIES
- III. RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM INCARCERATED VETERANS

The sections follow the layout of the interim charge, which is to: Examine gaps in services and assess efforts to connect justice-involved veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations to services while incarcerated and after release at both the local and state levels. Specifically, the committee should evaluate training and technical assistance provided by the Texas Veterans Commission to criminal justice agencies.

Interim Charge Information Starts Here

Note: The full 2020 TCCVS report may be found [here](#). The report details the unmet needs of Texas veterans. The relevant portions are listed below.

I. GAPS IN SERVICES/EFFORTS TO CONNECT JIV TO SERVICES

A. FROM MENTAL HEALTH WORKGROUP, TCCVS 2020

Unmet Veteran Need #3:

Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) Need Training on Veteran and Military Trauma to Increase Positive Outcomes in Police Interactions, to Assist in De-Escalating Situations, and to Divert Veterans from the Criminal Justice System.

Recommendations:

- Encourage/require that Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) 4067, Trauma Affected Veterans, become a mandatory class for all TCOLE certified LEOs with four or more years of service to create a safer environment for both veterans and LEO in Texas.
- The passing of the Sandra Bland Act (2017) requires all Texas LEOs to be trained in 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) as part of their basic peace officer course. To compliment this training, it is recommended that TCOLE 4067 become mandatory for all TCOLE certified officers with more than 4 years of experience.

Background: Texas has the second largest number of veterans in the country, the largest number of female veterans, and approximately 10% of veterans end up incarcerated, with more than 10% having some contact with law enforcement. As more veterans return from duty with Posttraumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Military Sexual Trauma, law enforcement officers (LEOs) need to be well-informed on veteran and military trauma, the symptoms that may present in the community, and effective de-escalation techniques. Additionally, during the Spring and Summer of 2020, there has been a national acknowledgment of the need for greater emphasis on de-escalation efforts from LEOs related to the use of force alternatives. Currently there is no national standard for training LEOs on the unique challenges that face trauma affected veterans. However, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) has generated a course to specifically address this need, TCOLE 4067 (Trauma Affected Veterans). This class emphasizes de-escalation, understanding of military trauma and possible LEO trauma, as well as resources for access to care. The Lubbock Police Department has added the TCOLE 4067 training to their basic officer course and the Midland Police Department and Harris County Sheriff's Offices are training all their officers. There are about 80,000 law enforcement officers in Texas, and for those who have received the TCOLE 4067 training, the response has been positive.

A survey was sent to all officers that had taken the course in 2017-18 to respond to two questions:

- 1) Do you think the TCOLE 4067 should be a mandatory course?
- 2) If yes, should it be added to the basic officers' course or mandatory within two years of obtaining TCOLE certification.

Of the respondents to this survey:

- 91% of those who have taken the TCOLE 4067 training think the TCOLE 4067 Training should be mandatory.
- 9% of those who have taken the class do not think it should be mandatory.
- 23% of Respondents think the training should be attached to basic officer training and
- 35% think it should be required within two years of becoming a TCOLE certified officer.

B) FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE WORKGROUP, TCCVS 2020

Unmet Veteran Need #1:

Increased access to veterans' status for justice involved veterans.

Recommendation:

Revise HB875 to be revised to indicate the information from the VA identification system shall be requested daily and be provided to the Veterans County service officer and the magistrate or governing court at law daily.

Background: Veterans are not being identified in a timely manner as required by HB 875. To improve outcomes, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (TLETS), and the Veterans Affairs Veterans Reentry Service System (VRSS) or other approved Veterans Affairs identification program should be connected and able to

provide veterans information to county jails for the purposes of continuity of care and veterans benefits. Additionally, the verbiage in HB 875 could be revised to indicate the veteran's information shall be requested at intake.

Unmet Veteran Need #2:

Currently there is no standard recidivism rate definition in Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC). Effectiveness for courts is generally based on recidivism and having a standard, uniform definition would make a stronger case for increasing funding.

Recommendation:

Texas should add a standard definition of recidivism in the Veterans Treatment Court Statute. The Texas Judicial Council (Council) should direct the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) to develop guidelines to establish a uniform recidivism rate definition for veteran's treatment courts for adoption by the Council; and, require OCA to compile the recidivism data for a 10-year period.

Background: Office of Court Administration (OCA) creation of guidelines on a definition and collection of rates for a 10-year period would assist in providing training and technical assistance for courts that will be based in evidence-based practices.

Having multiple definitions of recidivism and not having a central collection spot may create confusion about how courts are performing and may affect the ability of state and local grantors to assess the effectiveness of the programs. Standard definitions and collections will give grantors a better ability to determine effectiveness of programs, give Court Evaluators a specific standard for comparison and give the State of Texas concrete evidence for increasing funding and support of Veterans Treatment Courts.

Unmet Veteran Need #3:

Incarcerated veterans need access to veteran specific mental health, substance use and peer support programming and services while in jail and upon release to the community.

Recommendation:

Recommend increased collaboration amongst state agencies and local veterans support organizations, including volunteer and faith-based organizations, to provide support and funding for veterans PODS/Dorms and county jails.

Background: Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC) offer veterans programming and treatment for veterans that qualify. Veterans that do not qualify for VTC may still need programming for substance abuse and or mental health issues. Emerging practices across the country indicate having access to either veteran specific programming or veteran specific pods/dorms in jails with programming can make veterans more successful with reentry. Facilities that have access to the programming and pods/dorms reportedly have fewer behavioral problems and incidents of violence by incarcerated veterans. This may contribute to a less stressful, safer environment for correctional staff and promote community involvement with the veterans and their families.

(<https://info.nicic.gov/jiv/sites/info.nicic.gov/jiv/files/Barracks-Behind-Bars-508.pdf>).

Additionally, connecting veterans to services while incarcerated ensures a veteran has immediate access to services upon reentry and there is no interruption in care and support. There are a few exemplary jail programs that could be used as models including the VALOR program in Colin County, the Fort Bend Veterans program and Montgomery County Veterans Pod.

Unmet Veteran Need #4:

Jailers may not be well trained in veteran's needs.

Recommendation:

Have TCOLE 3917 revised to an online class and require for jailers with more than one year of experience.

Background: Jailers have a lack of training in veteran's trauma, needs, benefits and services. A four-hour online class could be required for advanced certificate holders and Jail Administrators. Texas jailers are required to complete:

1. Basic County Corrections
2. Mental Health Training for Jailers

About 9% of Veterans and service members who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been arrested since returning home. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23025247/>. Veterans have distinct military cultural and mental health characteristics that are different from those who have not served. It is important for jailers to understand these characteristics to avoid the risk of non-compliant behavior and reduce the risk of injury to both jailers and Veterans.

According to the Veterans Administration, more than half of justice-involved Veterans have either mental health problems—namely PTSD, depression, or high anxiety—or substance-abuse disorders, most notably alcohol or cocaine addiction. Plus, Veterans who collide with the criminal justice system may be at higher risk for suicide.

<https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0918-VA-researcher-examines-Vets-who-collidewith-criminal-justice-system.cfm>

II. TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE AGENCIES

A. TVC Trainings offered to Criminal Justice Agencies

- VMHD Trainings:
 - Sequential Intercept Model of Criminal Justice Involvement
 - Veteran Suicide Prevention
 - Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)
 - Ask about Suicide (ASK)
 - Trauma & Veteran Mental Health
 - How being Trauma Informed Improves Criminal Justice Outcomes
 - Trauma in the Criminal Justice System
 - Law Enforcement Trainings

- TCOLE 4067 Trauma Affected Veterans
- Jail Specific Trainings
 - TCOLE 3917 Justice Involved Veterans Jail Training
- Self-Care and Resiliency
- Peer Mentoring
- Veteran Treatment Court Mentor Bootcamp Program
- TVC Claims Trainings:
 - TVC's Claims Benefit Advisors for Incarcerated Veterans provide training to TDCJ on veteran benefits

B. Examples of Criminal Justice Stakeholders Trained by TVC

- American Probation & Parole Association
- Community Justice Assistance Division, TDCJ
- Correctional Management Institute of Texas Mental Health
- Federal Corrections Institution: Bastrop Federal Prison
- Federal Corrections Institution: Big Spring Federal Prison
- Federal Corrections Institution: La Tuna Federal Prison
- Justice for Vets, NADCP
- Securus Technology Criminal Justice Conference
- Texas Association of Specialty Courts
- Texas Corrections Association
- Texas Commission on Civil Commitment
- Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association
- Texas Criminal Justice Department / Texas Council on Offenders with Mental Illness
- Texas Jail Association
- MVPN Peer Service Coordinator Conference
- National Association of Drug Court Professionals
- National Institute of Corrections
- Women in Criminal Justice Conference/Symposium

C. Examples of Technical Assistance Offered by TVC

- Ongoing technical assistance provided to jurisdictions across Texas in establishing and maintaining Veteran Treatment Courts
- Chair, Criminal Justice Workgroup of Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services (TCCVS)
- Coordinate training and mentoring for Texas Association of Specialty Courts
- Collaborate with the Specialty Court Division of the Office of the Governor
- Manage the National Institute of Corrections Justice Involved Veterans Committee
- Coordinate veteran services for Texas Jail Association
- Develop and assist Veteran Inmate Groups
- Monthly coordination of veteran reentry services from State Jails with TDCJ and MVPN
- Collaborate with Commission on Jail standards about incarcerated veterans
- Provide Veteran Treatment Court information to Veterans Justice Outreach, VA
- Collaborate with Housing & Urban Development/VA Supportive Housing Program, VA
- Coordinate suicide trainings with Texas Tech Veterans Resource Center
- Serve on Veterans Treatment Court Panel on COVID with the National Institute of Corrections and American Probation and Parole Association

- Ongoing technical assistance to MVPN Peer Service Coordinators
- Ongoing technical assistance to Veteran Counselors Program
- Respond directly to incarcerated veterans and their families regarding JIV issues
- Board, Association of Parole & Probation Association
- Board, Texas Reentry Advisory Council
- Board, One Community
- Participate on committee to annually update TCOLE 4067 (Trauma Affected Veterans)
- Develop and annually update TCOLE 3917 (Veterans for Jailers)
- Contribute to Texas Suicide Prevention Council
- Additionally, TVC's Claims Benefit Advisors for Incarcerated Veterans process all incarcerated veterans claims across Texas and respond to inquiries from veterans and their families

III. RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM INCARCERATED VETERANS

A. Jail Cards

"Jail cards" were developed as an answer to the bill (HB875, 84th Session) telling the jails to run VRSS and inform the identified veterans about what benefits might be available to them. Having each jail provide this information was deemed too onerous for the jails, so TVC decided to create the cards. The intention is that the jail will run VRSS at intake and hand the jail card to the inmate. The inmate then fills out the card and it is mailed to TVC's VMHD. When VMHD receives the card, it is distributed to the appropriate person or department to coordinate and send the inmate information and resources relevant to what the inmate asked about. Over 1,000 individual pieces of correspondence from justice-involved veterans was received and responded to in FY2020. Due to recent enhancements made to the jail cards, it is anticipated that VMHD will receive even more jail cards annually in the coming years.

B. Interagency Collaboration

In addition to jail cards, VMHD maintains ongoing interagency collaboration, consultation, referral sharing, and coordination with multiple stakeholders across Texas.

Examples of this include:

- Coordination with TDCJ regarding the monthly list of veterans set to be released from state jail for the purposes of arranging reentry and continuity of care efforts.
- Referrals for justice-involved veterans in need are shared with VMHD from stakeholders including:
 - Veteran Treatment Courts
 - Texas Jail Project
 - Individual Jails across Texas
 - Veterans Inmate Groups
 - Texas Inmate Families Association
 - Governor's Office of Specialty Courts
 - Directly from Legislators
 - VA
 - Military Veteran Peer Network